

Robert Gschwendtner: Positions from 1941 to 1945

1) Inspector of the SS forced labour camps at DG 4 (1941-42)

The central supply line for Heeresgruppe Süd was the transit road IV (DG 4) from Wroclaw to the Caucasus. The first SS forced labour camps were established along this route in the Galician district as early as autumn 1941. Under the control of the SS and police leader (SSPF) Galicia, **Katzmann**, the slogan "extermination through work" was applied here: the average life expectancy of prisoners was only three months in 1941-1942. The construction companies at DG 4 had to pay rent for the Jewish forced labourers (4 - 6 Zloty for unskilled and skilled workers) to the SS on the basis of daily lists. SS officers **Rudolf Röder** and **Robert Gschwendtner**, as inspectors for the forced labour camps, checked the statements and collected cash from the companies, which they then paid into a Katzmann account. Gschwendtner also headed the "Judenlager" on Czwartaków Street in Lemberg for a time; he regularly deported Jews who happened to be in the office of the Judenrat to this forced labour camp.

2) Head of "resettlements" in Galicia (autumn 1942)

The **staff of the SSPF** (SS- und Polizeiführer) planned the large-scale actions to exterminate the Jews in Galicia. Most of the Jews were murdered in the spring and then from August 1942 onwards in centrally planned "resettlements", mainly in the extermination camp Belżec. In the counties, the overall direction of such actions was often taken by SSPF staff members such as **Gschwendtner** and **Hildebrand**. *"The evacuation of the Sambor ghetto and county on August 3/4, 1942 marked the beginning of the worst phase of 'Aktion Reinhard' in the area of SiPo Drohobycz. Either at the same time or on August 5-6, 1942, the Turka Rural District followed, immediately followed by the Drohobycz county including Boryslaw from August 6-8. Within five days, about 15,000 Jews were deported to Belzec and partly to the forced labor camp Lemberg-Janowska, and countless Jews were shot during the rounding-up of victims and the selections ... Katzmann had commissioned SS-Obersturmführer Gschwendtner to take overall charge of the action."* (Sandkühler, p. 334)

When on 6.8.1942 early in the morning the ghetto district Wolanka in Boryslaw was to be cleared, the news of the deportation from the neighbouring county of Sambor had already spread and most of the Jews were in hiding. Thereupon the action was stopped and the murder squads went to Drohobycz. There, among other things, the Jewish hospital was evacuated, patients in their beds were shot and the non-medical personnel was driven to the collection points for the transport to Belzec.

"Meanwhile many Boryslaw Jews had returned or left their hiding places. Late in the evening of August 6, the rounding-up of the Jews began again, now with brute force and in all parts of the city. Old and sick people, infants and Jews found in hiding were murdered on the spot; shooting and screaming could be heard from afar". (Sandkühler,

p. 337).

The commercial manager of the Carpathian Oil in Boryslaw, **Berthold Beitz**, should actually be on a business trip. At the request of his Jewish colleague Josef Hirsch, however, he had stayed in Boryslaw. Beitz hurried to the wagons at the railway station and tried to save as many Jews as possible by claiming them as irreplaceable workers for the Carpathian oil. *"With Gschwendtner, who likes to boast that he 'hanged a few Jews' by his own hand again, Beitz ... fights for every single life"* (Käppner, Beitz, p. 74)

At the end of 1942, Gschwendtner retires unexpectedly - officially for reasons of age. Gschwendtner was only 50 years old at that time! The real reasons are not known.

3) Quartermaster in the armament project "Dogger" (1944-45)

In order to be able to produce BMW aircraft engines - protected from Allied bombs - a widely ramified tunnel system was driven into a mountain near Happurg (35 km east of Nuremberg) from the summer of 1944. The project involved many foreign workers, SS prisoners and around 6,000 concentration camp inmates - including a Jewish work detachment. On the eastern outskirts of the city of Hersbruck, the concentration camp was established in August 1944, which was officially subordinated to the Flossenbürg main camp. In addition, a construction yard and barracks camp were built for "foreign workers" and for SS and police members who had committed criminal offences.

Robert Gschwendtner now worked for BMW (Bayerische Motorenwerke AG) and from mid-1944 was responsible for individual and mass accommodation for German and foreign workers ("Fremdarbeiter"). Here he could once again exert his power over "subhumans". The commercial clerk at the construction management **Konrad Errmann**, himself a concentration camp prisoner in 1933 and 1935, testified the brutality of Robert Gschwendtner:

»Towards autumn we had twenty to thirty prisoners in the building yard. A guard allowed them to scrape out the food buckets once at noon. The people started attacking the buckets. Then Gschwendtner came from the street. He shouted: "What's going on there? You bastards! I'll teach you to keep order!" He grabbed a shovel handle and started hitting the inmates at random. Shortly afterwards, two prisoners asked me to help their comrade. The prisoner lay in a pile. He had a large gaping wound at the temple. The prisoner did not move anymore. I called the Red Cross... The Red Cross nurse said she was not allowed to help foreigners or prisoners. I bandaged the wounds with tape.« (Quoted by Faul, Sklavenarbeiter, p. 55)

Sources: Sandkühler, „Endlösung“ in Galizien; Pohl, Ostgalizien; Geldmacher, Wir als Wiener; Faul: Sklavenarbeiter für den Endsieg; Käppner: Berthold Beitz